



I AM THE VINE;
YOU ARE THE BRANCHES.
THE ONE WHO REMAINS
IN ME AND I IN HIM
PRODUCES MUCH FRUIT,
BECAUSE YOU CAN DO
NOTHING WITHOUT ME.

J O H N 1 5 : 5 (C S B)

I AM

THE VINE

DATE

September 26 & 27

WEEK

7 of 7

OVERVIEW

John 15: 1-11

KEY VERSE

John 15:5

SETTING THE STAGE

This is the final of the seven *I Am* statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John. The first four were proclaimed in public formats, the fifth was privately said to Martha, the sister of Lazarus; the final two were said to only the disciples on the night Jesus was betrayed. John 13-17 is known as the Upper Room Discourse and describes the evening and early morning hours before Jesus was crucified. It is the most intimate of settings, the most somber of moments.

By the time of this passage, Jesus had washed the feet of the disciples, broken bread, and passed the wine for their last supper together. Jesus informed them that one would betray Him and that Peter would deny Him. Judas Iscariot had already departed, and it appears that at the end of John 14, Jesus and the remaining disciples left the room as well.

Jesus and the remaining 11 disciples walk from the Upper Room to the Garden of Gethsemane, which could have taken them by the Temple of Herod. The Temple was known to have two-leaved doors with gold plating and the symbol of Israel hanging above with a gigantic vine of pure gold, each cluster the height of a man.¹ This may have been the visual object lesson leading to the words in chapter 15, in addition to the garden itself.

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LESSON OUTLINE

1. Position
2. Pruning
3. Production
4. Promises

THINGS TO KNOW

- The Greek word "*Menō*" means "remain, stay, abide, live, dwell, or continue." It is used ten times in John 15:1-10.
- Throughout the Old Testament, God refers to His people Israel as a "vine" or a "vineyard" (Isaiah 5:1-7; 27:2-6; Jeremiah 2:21; 12:10; Ezekiel 15; 19:10-14; Hosea 10:1; Psalm 80:8-19).
- This passage is spoken to the disciples and believers.

I AM THE VINE

Setting the Stage, continued >

Jesus is teaching knowing that these words would be among the final words He would speak to the disciples before He would be arrested, in the darkness of the early morning hours on the night He was betrayed.

Introduction

The world's best apples grow in the Columbia Basin of eastern Washington State. About half the apples we eat grow in this small region. If you visit in late summer, you will see rolling hills lined by neat rows of apple trees sagging under the weight of ripe Red Delicious, Granny Smith, Gala, and Honeycrisp apples.

Ask any Washington apple farmer the secret to growing such delicious fruit and he will tell you: location, location, location. The cool, dry, sun-kissed Columbia Basin—where the Yakima, Columbia, and Snake rivers come together—makes a perfect place for growing apples, along with grapes, cherries, pears, and dozens of other crops too! ² The climate is incredibly consistent. If a farmer remains in the fertile basin, he can expect to reap good fruit season after season.

Jesus has a similar message for His disciples in John 15. He offers a blessed, fruitful, abundant life to His followers—if only they remain right where they are, connected to Him.

In this passage, we will hear the seventh and final “I Am” statement in John’s gospel. Jesus declares this statement and the one before it (“*I am the way, the truth, and the life...*” John 14:6) on the night of His betrayal. Both statements reveal Jesus as the only source of peace with God and a life of eternal significance. To illustrate this in the seventh statement, Jesus paints an unforgettable picture. He begins simply: “*I am the true vine.*”

JOHN 15:1-11 *“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² Every branch in Me that does not produce fruit He removes, and He prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in Me.” ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in Me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷ If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be My disciples.*



¹ www.soniclight.com/john

² <http://treefruit.wsu.edu/orchard-management/>

⁹ “As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in My love. ¹⁰ If you keep My commands you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commands and remain in His love. ¹¹ “I have told you these things so that My joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.” (CSB)

1. POSITION

In these precious last hours of Jesus’ life, the Lord is revealing staggering truths to His disciples that will encourage them in the difficult days ahead. Jesus begins in John 15 with two images familiar to all Jews: a gardener and a vine.

God was known to be a “gardener” as He planted a garden in Eden. (Genesis 2:8) The people of Israel were known to be God’s “vine.” Out of all the people on earth, God had treated the Israelites with special care as a gardener by providing, protecting, and pruning that which He had planted. However, the vine was not faithful to the gardener.

ISAIAH 5:7 “For the vineyard of the Lord of Armies is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah, the plant He delighted in. He expected justice but saw injustice; He expected righteousness but heard cries of despair.” (CSB)

PSALM 80:14-16 “Return, God of Armies. Look down from heaven and see; take care of this vine, the root your right hand planted, the son that you made strong for yourself. It was cut down and burned; They perish at the rebuke of Your countenance.” (CSB)

So, when Jesus uttered the words of John 15:1, the disciples already understood that God was a good gardener, and they knew that Israel had been an unfruitful vine. But what they were not prepared for was Jesus declaring Himself to be the “*true vine*.” He does what Israel could never do because Jesus Himself “*came from God*” (John 8:42) and has “*life in Himself*” (John 5:26).

Jesus makes clear the position He has; the position God has; and the position of the disciples. Jesus as the *True Vine* is connected to God in a vital, permanent, and fruitful way. Throughout His ministry, Jesus would connect His position with the Father. (John 5:19, 10:30, 14:9-11) Yet here, in this allegory, Jesus provides the disciples with a visual picture of what that positioning looks like. There are certain responsibilities based on the position.

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God is the gardener, or as some translations say, the vinedresser. God, the Father, loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, the *True Vine* to this world. The *True Vine* was planted and grew and developed branches. The *True Vine* was dependent on the gardener and would not do anything without the direction and approval of the gardener.

The *True Vine* had branches, which in this allegory are the disciples. The position of the branch is directly connected to the vine. The phrase “*in Me*” appears nine times in the first eleven verses of this chapter. A key to understanding what Jesus meant by “abiding/ remaining” is the expression, “*in Me*,” which reflects a theological concept called “positional truth” or “identification.” Paul the apostle often described believers as being “in Christ.” ³

The vinedresser would always look at the branch as it is connected to, abiding or remaining with the vine. The branch gets its nourishment from the vine. The fruit that the branch would eventually bear was not based so much on the branch but the nourishment from and connection to the vine.

³ Chuck Swindoll, *Swindoll’s New Testament Insights*; Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010; p. 257.

The disciples received nourishment from Jesus over the course of the previous three or more years of ministry. Imagine how different it would have been if they had not remained with Jesus after the wedding in Cana where Jesus changed water into wine. But by remaining “in Him” they heard the truths of the beatitudes, they saw the healing of the lepers, they were able to have their feet washed by Jesus just a few hours earlier in the evening. Their lives were changed because of their position in Christ and remaining with Him on the journey that took them in and out of villages, some welcoming them with open arms, others chasing them out of town. Their position, however, would also lead to times of pruning.

2. PRUNING

JOHN 15:2-3 *Every branch in Me that does not produce fruit He removes, and He prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. (CSB)*

The pruning process is not done by accident or without purpose. The branch does not ask for the pruning, it is done at the discretion and direction of the gardener. The Farmers Almanac says, “Pruning isn’t just for shape and style. Pruning helps to manage the growth and structure of shrubs and trees, removes dead or diseased stems and branches, and encourages the development of flowers, fruit, and new foliage.” ⁴

Notice in verse 2 that two processes are going on, removal and pruning. The branches that are not producing fruit are removed. That does not mean they cease being branches. They are and will always be branches, but they have merely been removed. The word translated “remove” is the Greek word, “*Airo*” which means, “to raise, elevate, move from its place.” ⁵ This movement as well as the pruning is done by the gardener, God. I would submit that both processes could be described as deliberate grace.

Grace is often seen as something kind, comforting, and even casual. Deliberate grace is not always easy to receive. A branch that is being raised, elevated, or moved is probably a branch that has become complacent, stagnant, and comfortable with the status quo. The moving from its place would be uncomfortable to say the least, but necessary based on the discretion of the gardener.

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However, a branch that is producing fruit, receiving proper nourishment because of abiding, and remaining connected strongly to the vine, also receives this deliberate grace that seems invasive. Dr. Young once said in a sermon on this passage, “as a branch we must submit to the knife of the gardener.” ⁶ There is submission involved in the pruning process. The knife of the gardener deliberately cuts the branch not because it has no value, but because the gardener sees it has greater potential. The pruning takes place so that the branch will produce more fruit. The pruning process of deliberate grace can be painful, confusing, and sometimes embarrassing; that which was full and healthy becomes bare, vulnerable, and exposed. However, it is through the pruning process that the branch grows even stronger and healthier in every way. God as the gardener wants each branch to not only stay connected to the vine but to flourish with fruit, maximizing the potential and purpose of that branch.

⁴ <https://www.almanac.com/content/pruning-guide-trees-shrubs>

⁵ Biblestudytools.com/lexicon

⁶ Dr. Ed Young, *Who is Jesus Series*, 2001.

Jesus immediately goes from pruning to cleaning. *“You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”* In Greek, the word for “clean” is *“katharoi.”* In verse 3 it forms a wordplay with the word “prune,” *“kathairei”* in verse 2. It literally means clean and pure. Remember, Jesus is talking to the 11 remaining disciples, they are not perfect, but they are clean based on their relationship to the “word” spoken by Jesus.

“Word,” is a rich idea in John’s gospel. Jesus Himself is identified as the “Word” made flesh in John 1. The quickest way to understand the cleansing “word I have spoken” in John 15:3 is to look at John 14:10 where Jesus says, *“Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words I speak to you I do not speak on My own. The Father who lives in Me does His works.”* So, God does works through Jesus’ words. When Jesus says *“you are already clean...”* He is telling the disciples that if someone believes Jesus’ words, God does a cleansing work in their life. It is by grace through faith in Christ that we are cleansed. It is by believing the Word of God that we are washed. It is by trusting the Promises of God that we are made clean.⁷

3. PRODUCTION

JOHN 15:4-6 *“Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in Me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in Me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned. (CSB)*

Jesus is letting the disciples and us know that this is all about our relationship with Him. We are to remain and abide in Jesus. In these verses Jesus reconfirms the fact of His position and our position by saying, *“I am the vine; you are the branches.”* And for those branches who remain and abide in Jesus, fruit will be produced. In fact, Jesus goes as far as to say, *“much fruit”* will be produced.

Just like grapes from a vine or apples from a tree, a life connected to Jesus Christ will produce fruit. Jesus chooses not to expand on what specifically the fruit is or what it looks like or how you can monitor the production. But He does make it clear there are those branches who try to make it alone, apart from Jesus that are *“unable to produce fruit.”* Then, some branches remain and abide in Jesus and produce *“much fruit.”* Notice it is not about the branch, it is all about the connection. As long as the branch is connected to the vine, there will be fruit.

This is not a contest between the branches, nor is it about the amount of fruit; this is about staying connected to the vine, Jesus. And as a result of that connection, there will be fruit. Warren Wiersbe says this about the production of fruit in a broader sense,

“Several different kinds of spiritual fruit are named in the Bible. We bear fruit when we win others to Christ (Romans 1:13). We are part of the harvest (John 4:35-38). As we grow in holiness and obedience, we are bearing fruit (Romans 6:22). Paul considered Christian giving to be fruit from a dedicated life (Romans 15:28). “The Fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22-23) is the kind of Christian character that glorifies God and makes Christ real to others. Even our good works, our service, grow out of our abiding life (Colossians 1:10). The praise that comes from our hearts and lips is actually fruit to the glory of God (Hebrews 14:15).”⁸

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⁷ dailyverse.knowing-jesus.com/John-15-3

⁸ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe New Testament Bible Commentary*, David C. Cook, Colorado Springs, 2007; p. 285.

Of course, the “fruits” of living a godly life, giving, praising, and making new disciples are so closely related, it is better to think of them as different uses of the same fruit—like applesauce and apple juice. The ingredients are almost identical, and this is why Jesus keeps telling His disciples that the main thing is to remain in Him as the source, which is the vine.

Beyond producing fruit, Jesus also has a sober warning for those who choose not to remain connected to Him. Not only will they fail to produce fruit, but they will also be removed, withered up, and finally burned. This is not about nonbelievers, remember Jesus is talking specifically and intimately to His disciples. This also should not be looked upon as someone losing salvation because it would contradict other Scripture that shows the security of the believer. Since the subject is the bearing of fruit and not eternal life, the burning is a judgment upon fruitlessness, not an abandonment to eternal destruction.⁹ In verse 6, notice that the branch is singular, “*he is thrown aside, he withers.*” But then it changes to plural, “*They gather them, throw them, they are burned.*” It has been suggested that it is the works done in the flesh while the person is not abiding in Christ that is being burned. There are many interpretations of this particular verse, which should be considered in light of the totality of Scripture. It is unwise to build a theological doctrine on a parable or allegory.¹⁰

Jesus then shows what life will be like when you do remain and abide in Him.

4. PROMISES

JOHN 15:7-11 *If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you.⁸ My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be My disciples.”⁹ “As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in My love.¹⁰ If you keep My commands you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commands and remain in His love.¹¹ “I have told you these things so that My joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. (CSB)*

If you look at verse 7 and get excited because it appears to be a promised blank check to the bank of heaven; you have misunderstood the meaning and context. The very first word, “*If,*” lets us know there is a condition involved. “*If you remain in Me and My words remain in you,*” is the essence of this entire passage about a relationship with Jesus. We, as His disciples, are to remain and abide in Him. We are to be connected to Him. We are to listen to Him. Honestly, we have this easier than the 11 disciples did who had to rely on their memories of those three years. We have the words of Jesus at our fingertips. We have the revelation of God, the Gardener, and Creator of the Universe at our fingertips. The Bible is the Word of God where we find and embrace the words of God. The Greek word of “word” in verse 3, is the word “*Logos,*” the same word John used in John 1:1 to describe Jesus as The Word. The Greek word for “word” in verse 7 is “*Rhema*” which means “that which has been uttered by a living being, words spoken.”¹¹ The words spoken and taught by Jesus are to remain and abide in us, giving us the nourishment provided as to branch from a vine.

If that is true, then do you receive a blank check? No! If that is true, then you will be walking in rhythm and purpose based on what Jesus wants for your life. Your prayers will not be prayers based on selfishness, conceit or envy. Your prayers will be prayers as Jesus prayed, “*Not My will,*

⁹ www.soniclight.com/John

¹⁰ Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe New Testament Bible Commentary*, p. 285.

¹¹ www.biblestudytools.com/lexicon

but Thy will be done." (Luke 22:42) When you are remaining in Jesus and His words are remaining in you, your prayer life changes. As we think as God thinks, we ask for what is consistent with His plan, which results in His giving us what we ask.¹²

The promises continue in that God will be glorified as we remain in Jesus. Jesus then promises that He has loved us as His Father has loved Him. That is a kind of love that is beyond our comprehension. This is a sacrificial and provisional love that is truly supernatural. Because of this kind of love, we naturally will want to keep His commands and teachings. His teachings will become an effortless overflow in our lives and relationships. Obedience to God's Word shapes our heart into a conduit for divine, fruit-bearing, love.

And then we come to one more promise about joy. Jesus lets us in on why He has told us this story, using an analogy in verse 11; *"I have told you these things so that My joy may be in you and your joy may be complete."* Jesus wants us to live a life of joy. Joy that comes from a connection to Him, the Vine. Joy that will give us strength during those times of pruning. Joy that will give us endurance during those seasons leading to the fruit. Joy that comes in the evening when the sun goes down and meets us in the morning when the sun comes up on a new day of challenges and opportunities.

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HOW HIS PLAN SHAPES OUR PURPOSE

One of the most peculiar things about the apple orchards in Eastern Washington is the trees themselves. They are rather unimpressive. Squat-like, knotted, uneven-looking overgrown bushes might be a better description. They are the last place you would rest under for shade. And they do not make a very good background for photos.

But come September, the fruit on those ugly trees is incredible. The glory of the Columbia Basin is not the squatty apple trees, it is the abundant fruit they produce.

Like those knotty apple trees, Jesus does not promise to make His people impressive to the world. He promises to connect them to a life-giving relationship with His Heavenly Father. This happens because of our position in Him. This happens when we are willing to submit to the knife of the gardener in the pruning process. This happens when we bear fruit and much fruit as we remain in Him. This happens as His promises nourish us now and forever with divine love.

His plan as a gardener is to provide a vine that allows us to be the branches, branches of purpose, and promise.

¹² Chuck Swindoll; *Swindoll's New Testament Insights*; Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 2010; p. 259.